Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C02996436

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The National Intelligence **Daily**

Published by the Director of Central Intelligence for Named Principals Only

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SATURDAY APRIL 10, 1976 VOLUME 3, NUMBER 85

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WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Argentina: Violence Increases

Mounting political violence has become a major headache for the new Argentine government. Dozens have died in clashes between the left and right since the military takeover on March 24. Urban guerrillas are attacking police and security officials, and the right is retaliating.

President Videla has pledged to crush the terrorists by legal means and thus avoid the excesses characteristic of military regimes elsewhere. The military's determination to end the violence, however, was among the factors that led it to take over the government.

The right-wing vigilante groups are particularly troublesome for the junta. It was widely believed in Argentina that the groups' actions were condoned or perhaps inspired by the Peron government. The junta does not want the same reputation.

There is no indication that the junta is giving even tacit approval to attacks on leftists by off-duty police and security officials, but a continuation could quickly reduce the good will the public has shown the new government. The junta is acutely aware that it needs to make a favorable impression at home and abroad in order to deal successfully with such critical problems as the economy.

Advocates of harsh repression in the military cite the continued left-wing violence as justification for the tough measures they have proposed all along. This would play into the hands of leftists who hope to provoke repression in the belief that it would cause repudiation of military government in Argentina.

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